

PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS PROVING EFFECTIVE IN FIGHTING GUN CRIME LOCALLY, NATIONALLY

Attorney General John Ashcroft Announces Record Increase in Federal Firearms Prosecutions

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. – U.S. Attorney Patrick Meehan today joined Attorney General John Ashcroft in applauding the record of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and prosecutors who are working together through Project Safe Neighborhoods to prevent and prosecute gun crime.

“Newly released data shows record-levels of federal prosecutions of gun crime,” said Attorney General Ashcroft. “Gun criminals are paying unprecedented penalties, and law-abiding Americans are enjoying unprecedented safety. Under President Bush’s leadership, Project Safe Neighborhoods is making a tremendous difference in ensuring that gun crime equals hard time.”

“Since September 1, 2001 through the end of last month, our office has indicted 682 defendants under Project Safe Neighborhoods. Within that same period of time, 498 defendants have been sentenced to an average prison term of nine years,” said Meehan. “There’s no question that by sending the message that convicted felons with guns face serious time, our neighborhoods are becoming safer.”

A Record of Increased Prosecutions. In the past three years, federal gun crime prosecutions have increased by 68 percent nationwide. Between FY 2002 and FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased nearly 24 percent, and since FY 2000, there has been a 62 percent increase in defendants charged with firearm-related crimes.

Project Safe Neighborhoods first set a record in FY 2002 for increasing the number of defendants charged with gun-related crimes by 20 percent. During this year, Project Safe Neighborhoods set a new Justice Department record with nearly 23 percent more defendants charged with gun crimes.

Federal offenders are being sentenced to significant jail time. In FY 2003, 93 percent of defendants were sentenced to some prison time, and about 72 percent of offenders were sentenced to prison terms greater than three years.

A Drop in Violent Crime Victimization. The increased emphasis on prevent and prosecution of gun crimes makes our communities more safe by ensuring that those who abuse firearms are not free to prey on our citizens. Between 1999-2000 and 2001-2002, the violent crime victimization rate plunged 21 percent. Approximately 130,000 fewer Americans were victims of gun crime in 2001-2002 than in 1999-2000.

National Scope, Local Impact. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an unprecedented partnership between all levels of government to implement a national strategy to attack gun crime with focus and intensity. While national in scope, each

community's PSN task force is working to design and implement a local approach to combat the unique criminal circumstances that the area faces. Project Safe Neighborhoods relies on a seamless network of law enforcement professionals who utilize a strategy of cooperation and coordination to prevent illegal gun use, as well as punishing violators and putting criminals who use guns behind bars. Prosecutors pursue the strongest possible punishment for those who violate firearms statutes. Community partners aggressively educate their constituents, such as youths in at-risk areas, about the consequence of illegal gun violence through services and resources provided by PSN.

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